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SUBJECT: Somalia - Perspectives on TFG-ASWJ Agreement

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CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Patterson, Counselor for Somalia Affairs, State
Department, Somalia Unit; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) The February 13 agreement between the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a (ASWJ) (reftel) represents potential progress in their ongoing collaboration. But to be successful, the agreement must first gain the support of ASWJ on the ground, especially from leaders and their forces who frequently clash with al-Shabaab. ASWJ representatives from Galgaduud and other regions engaged in active fighting against al-Shabaab told us they were not represented at the Addis talks. ASWJ representatives argued that formal power-sharing discussions with the TFG are premature and that both sides should be more focused on military cooperation to defeat al-Shabaab. ASWJ leaders told us that before discussing governmental posts, they would do better to first work at the grassroots level to establish a common position and a joint leadership structure across regions (and clans). They said that Ethiopia was pushing through an agenda to favor one clan (Hawiye/Habr Gedir/Ayr) and that all parties were there only to gain financial resources and materiel from an international community anxious to see the TFG broaden its support base. The TFG and ASWJ are seeking at least \$150,000 in the next two weeks to gain broad-based support for the agreement and \$5 million for the following implementation phase. Deputy SRSG Charles Petrie has warned us and other internationals not to be seen as stampeding reluctant ASWJ groups to an agreement. While we strongly support TFG-ASWJ collaboration, formalizing a power-sharing agreement at present may distract both from planned offensives against al-Shabaab and introduce new political fissures that neither party can afford. Nevertheless, we are counseling ASWJ leaders to curb their rhetoric and engage in productive discussions to strengthen this agreement. End Summary.

Potential for Progress

¶2. (C) As reported reftel, on February 13 TFG Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Finance Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden and Sheikh Mahmud Sheikh Hassan (Hawiye/ Habr Gedir/Ayr) , a Saudi Arabia-based spiritual leader of ASWJ, initialed an agreement to

integrate ASWJ and the TFG. UN Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General Charles Petrie briefed us privately, and later, international Somalia watchers on the agreement. According to Petrie, the agreement is a positive step, but will challenge ASWJ's ability to unite itself. Indeed, he said, he was hearing reports some ASWJ leaders, including important Galgaduud region ASWJ leader "Heffo" were rejecting the agreement. Petrie counseled quite diplomacy to encourage ASWJ leaders to move past their dissatisfaction and begin to discuss the agreement. Petrie asked us to work behind the scenes, but not to raise the agreement's visibility in a way that might be threatening to those feeling left out for the moment. He emphasized this was only an initialed agreement, with a two-week period meant to allow for consensus building. When we spoke to the Prime Minister, he said the TFG cabinet had been briefed today, and would accept the agreement, despite some grumbling. He asked us to reach out to disaffected TFG ministers and key ASWJ leaders, especially in Galgaduud region, and try to "smooth ruffled feathers."

13. (C) This agreement represents another attempt to formalize the relationship between the government and this important religious group cum fighting force. Since the first agreement between the TFG and ASWJ was signed in Nairobi in June 2009, there have been fits and starts in their collaboration. According to our sources, the TFG has transferred limited financial resources to ASWJ, with some funds reportedly ending up in unintended hands. Almost all the various ASWJ groups with which we meet have praised

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the fledging TFG-ASWJ partnership but also have asked for the U.S. to encourage the TFG to do more, as quickly as possible.

"The 'Spiritual Leader' Does Not Speak for Us"

14. (C) In our initial consultations with our ASWJ contacts in Nairobi and the regions, we heard skepticism about the Addis agreement. Our contacts lamented that the talks in Addis were being spearheaded by an ASWJ faction which had moved too quickly, and not consulted with other ASWJ factions around Somalia. While they acknowledge that Sheikh Mahmud is influential, they said that he had been away from Somalia for some time and was out of touch with the political and security realities on the ground. Expressing concern they may be shut out of the agreement's largess of cabinet ministries and other government posts, they said, "He better arrive with something significant to put on the table." To us they questioned the rationale and optics of holding the talks in Addis instead of within Somalia. They claimed that Sheikh Mahmud was brought in by his (reportedly) kinsman, ASWJ financier Mahdi Dahir Sheikh Nur, who has been advocating for ASWJ in Addis since last year.

15. (SBU) In a February 10 meeting, ASWJ representatives with ties to the Galgaduud region, they told us that they have no problem with disparate groups assuming the AWSJ mantle to fight against al-Shabaab, since the majority of Somali's share the Sufi traditions and beliefs at ASWJ's core. Post has been in closest contact with the Southern Galgaduud group led by Sheikh Amir (Hawiye/Abgal/Waesle) and Northern Galgaduud-based Sheikh Omar Sheikh Mohamud (Hawiye/Murosade), both of which frequently clash with al-Shabaab. At that time they presciently emphasized the urgent need to bring together ASWJ groups into a more formalized structure with a common vision, objectives, and leadership structure. Seemingly unaware of impending meetings in Addis, they said they were working with other ASWJ groups to convene a conference to elect representatives who would then be empowered to hold formal negotiations with the TFG. When asked on February 18

about the current discussions in Addis, they told us Sheikh Mahmud does not speak on their behalf.

¶6. (C) Some of the groundwork to establish political cooperation among ASWJ factions began in 2009 with technical conferences bringing together members of several ASWJ factions in Hiran, Galgaduud, and Mogadishu under Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Muhiyadin (Hawiye/Abgal). In December, embassy funds supported an ASWJ workshop in Nairobi that made progress on bringing together various ASWJ factions. Also in December, Sheikh Mahmud returned to Galgaduud for the ASWJ meeting in Abudwaq. This meeting was cut short by an al-Shabaab attack, but not before a leadership struggle alienated Sheikh Omar from Sheikh Mahmud. We understand that Sheikh Omar was not consulted and was sidelined from the Addis talks. These representatives told us they are in full support of collaboration with the TFG, but that any power-sharing negotiations and talk of ministerial positions were premature.

Strategies to Build Support

¶7. (C) While the text of the agreement has not been made public, scanned copies of it are being circulated widely. By dedicating so many seats for ASWJ, the agreement is politically "expensive" for the TFG, observers told us. Some TFG officials are already resisting the idea of expanding the cabinet further to accommodate five new ministers and numerous additional government

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positions. Some may also be wondering if their cabinet seat is in jeopardy. TFG officials have previously cautioned that giving up seats to ASWJ will open the floodgates for all other groups to "demand their part." Yet other officials told us that TFG needs ASWJ and is in no position to play hard ball. Gaining support within the TFG to sign the agreement will be easier than the implementation phase of the agreement, where the government will have to decide how it will divvy up the positions along the 4.5 clan formula. In contrast, ASWJ will have more difficulty getting initial buy in and establishing a legitimate signatory to the agreement.

¶8. (C) The UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) is reaching out to key donors to help garner diplomatic and financial support for the agreement, emphasizing the immediate need for resources that will not fall into the traditional funding categories. A UN official told us Ethiopia "is leaning hard" on UNPOS to secure cash to allow especially the ASWJ to visit the regions to sell the agreement. Current estimates are that at least \$150,000 will be needed for the ASWJ's campaign, according to UNPOS. UNPOS has funds that it can use to for this initial cash infusion to support these discussions and the Danish representative in Addis has promised to provide 150,000 through IGAD (so long as it is not the only donor), according to the UN.

Comment

¶9. (C) The Addis agreement is indeed a positive step wherein both parties re-affirm their commitment "to eradicate the scourge of extremism," recognize the Transitional federal Charter, strengthen the Transitional Federal Institutions, and support the Djibouti Process. Most important, by integrating ASWJ into

government structures, the agreement would integrate their security forces. Also important is TFG willingness to accept regional administration already established by ASWJ in areas under its control (Note: This was a major sticking point in the lead-up to talks in Jeddah last December. However, the agreement will only be a major step forward if both sides, but ASWJ in particular, is able to bring together its factions and secure broad based support. ASWJ representatives said that at present, this agreement has no legs because there was no work done to prepare the ground for a formal power-sharing agreement.

¶10. (C) Comment, cont.: With UNPOS we have been discussing strategies to help build concrete support for this agreement prior to an official signature. One idea is to bring the council of nine ASWJ spiritual leaders who were elected in Dusamareb, and would include Sheikh Omar, out of Somalia (perhaps to Djibouti) to meet with Sheikh Mahmud and to establish the signatories that would represent ASWJ . Deputy SRSG Charles Petrie believes that if the leaders were to meet in Dusamareb, the agreement would never be signed. Petrie has warned us and other internationals not to be seen as stampeding reluctant ASWJ groups to an agreement. We are encouraging our ASWJ contacts to discuss the agreement, highlighting the positive aspects of integrating their security forces with the TFG. While a public statement of support for the agreement from the United States may be premature (and could inadvertently discourage certain camps) , we will encourage both sides to continue dialogue toward signing and operationalizing the agreement.

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